

## PREPARING ROSES FOR FALL

by Albert Ford

(adapted from the September-October 1994 MRS Newsletter)

On the threshold of September and October we should be concerned with, or at least should be thinking about, how we are going to prepare our rose beds for winter and what rose garden activities we should attend to before it gets too late in the year. Some thoughts (and a reminder to myself) are as follows:

**Spraying:** It is tempting to put our spray equipment away about this time of year, especially after the last rose show is over, Labor Day is history and children head gleefully back to school. We should, however, continue our regular spray program until there is clear evidence that our roses are planning their vacation and appear to be closing up shop. This occurs most often in late November or early December in this area; however, blooms in December are not unheard of. We will note curling and dropping of leaves and some thickening and color change in rose hips which we have left to mature after the middle of October. Continue spraying regularly until these events occur.

**Cleanliness:** From the beginning of September on you will notice, if you haven't already, that there is an accumulation of spent petals and leaves on the ground around the rose plants. The leaves will be of various colors, some yellow, some brown and curling and some will probably show evidence of blackspot which is at its highest incidence as we approach Fall. This debris harbors the spores of blackspot and mildew and should be removed and discarded. Don't put it on your mulch pile, let the trash collector carry it away. Try to keep the ground or mulch in your rose beds free of weeds and rose litter. It is easier to keep up with the litter production, I have found, than to do it all at once. A small hand rake or a dowel with a sharpened nail in the end facilitates this cleanup.

**Fall Planting:** Some rosarians prefer to plant new roses in the Spring. Some, however, think that a new rose bush planted in the Fall has a head start on one planted in the spring. This is true, provided the new roses survives the winter. If you have not tried Fall planting, it's worth a try.

First, you must select varieties from a nursery that ships in the fall. Hortico (<http://www.hortico.com>), in Canada, for example, will ship in the fall but only after the second frost in that area according to a Hortico spokesperson. This means, the plants may arrive after the middle of December but usually before. I've had them arrive in late November.

If you have plants on order, be sure you have a place to put them when they arrive. New plant holes should be prepared in advance and given some time to settle. If you are replacing a rose, there is a question as to whether to re-use the mixture from the hole or to discard it and prepare all new material. If the rose being replaced has done well you might risk using the old mix. If it has done poorly and that is the reason you are replacing the rose, I would suggest you prepare a new mixture. The new mixture should contain compost, if you have it; good top soil; and sifted clay mixed with two generous cups of gypsum, in approximately equal proportions. If you lack compost, peat moss may be substituted. Do not add a fertilizer containing nitrogen to the mixture. A cup of Superphosphate or bonemeal will help form a new feeder root system for your new rose, but nitrogen can be injurious. Most importantly, when your new rose is planted (in

accordance with nursery instructions), mound the new canes with soil to about ten inches, forming an inverted cone to protect the new canes from blowing and drying winds and the bitter cold which will surely come. This cone of soil should remain in place until Spring when it is removed a little at a time as the surrounding air temperature increases.

If you are planting in soil already heavy with clay, you may wish to substitute sand for half of the clay-gypsum treated part of the soil mixture recommended above. If you already have your own planting mixture which works for you, by all means, use it. Do remember that even for a rose planted in Spring, don't think you are doing it a favor by fertilizing with nitrogen. Save the general fertilizers containing nitrogen until after new foliage has begun to form in the Spring.

**Container Roses:** The planting of container roses can be done anytime plants are available for the purpose. This issue provides some hints on how to go about it; however, a more complete treatment of the subject by Larry Toole of Little Silver, New Jersey appeared in the January-February, 1993 issue of the MRS Newsletter. If you are interested in this facet of rose culture, get a copy of Larry's article (<http://www.mgs.md.gov/mdrose/docs/indorminis.pdf>).

**Use Your Consulting Rosarians:** For answers to questions which may occur to you as the growing season for roses winds down, remember to call one of the MRS Consulting Rosarians. Their names and phone numbers appear on the cover every MRS newsletter.

**Fall Pruning:** Serious pruning is not recommended to occur until late November or December. The pruning done in the fall of the year, according to Charlie Bell, is simply to keep long canes from whipping around in the wind and loosening the mulch or soil around the crown of the plant and thus exposing it unnecessarily to frigid cold temperatures and winds. Charlie cuts back the canes to about waist high and does not apply a sealer to the canes. (The danger of boring insects is pretty much behind us by September.) He also removes any rose canker that may be present, taking care to dip his shears into rubbing alcohol after wards to prevent the spread of that disease.

Rose canker hasn't appeared very often in my garden, but I have had to deal with it. The presence of canker is not reason in itself for getting rid of a rose plant. In the few prior cases, I removed the unsightly growth with shears or other suitable cutting tools and applied alcohol to the good tissue exposed in the process. So far I have not lost a plant treated in this manner, nor have I noted reoccurrence of the disease at the same site.